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ABSTRACT

Body language, also called kinesics, is the discipline concerned with the study of all bodily motions that are communicative. An understanding of kinesics across cultures necessitates a close look at posture, movement, facial expression, eye management, gestures, and proxemics (distancing). The popularity of one posture over another and the emotion conveyed by a given posture seems to be largely determined by culture. Recent studies of rhythm and dance as they relate to body movement have revealed astonishing new insights into human interaction. Facial expressions are very revealing and would be an important aspect of language learners attempting to master the nonverbal system of another culture. The role of eye contact in a conversational exchange between two Americans is well defined and is intensely important in interpersonal communication. An understanding of the role gestures play (autistic, technical and folk) within a culture is critical to sensitive communication. In each culture, the use of space (proxemics) depends upon the nature of the social interaction, but all cultures distinguish the four basic categories of intimate, personal, social, and public distance. While it is clear that all cultures make use of kinesic behaviors in communication, scholars do not agree on the precise nature of the role they play and are searching for some kinesic universals. An appendix is included with suggested activities for sensitizing students to aspects of nonverbal communication. A bibliography is also appended. (NCR)

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LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION:

THEORY & PRACTICE

7 **Kinesics and Cross-Cultural Understanding**

Genelle G. Morain

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LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION: THEORY AND PRACTICE

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KINESICS AND CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

> I grew up in Iowa and I knew what to do with butter: you put it on roastin' ears, pancakes, and popcorn. Then I went to France and saw a Frenchman put butter on radishes. I waited for the Cosmic Revenge--for the Eiffel Tower to topple, the Seine to sizzle, or the grape to wither on the vine. But that Frenchman put butter on his radishes, and the Gallic universe continued unperturbed. I realized then something I hadn't learned in five years of language study: not only was speaking in French different from speaking in English, but buttering in French was different from buttering in English. And that was the beginning of real cross-cultural understanding.[1]

Those who interact with members of a different culture know that a knowledge of the sounds, the grammar, and the vocabulary of the foreign tongue is indispensable when it comes to sharing information. But being able to read and speak another language does not guarantee that understanding will take place. Words in themselves are too limited a dimension. The critical factor in understanding has to do with cultural aspects that exist beyond the lexical--aspects that include the many dimensions of nonverbal communication.

Students of human nature have always been aware of messages sent by movement. Wily old Benjamin Franklin packed his new bifocals into his valise when he left for Paris and confided later to his diary how much they facilitated cross-cultural communication:

> I wear my spectacles constantly...When one's ears are not well accustomed to the sounds of the language, a sight of the movements in the features of him that speaks helps to explain: so that I understand better by the help of my spectacles.[2]

Today, 200 years later, Americans are becoming increasingly interested in nonverbal communication. The current spurt of books on movement and gesture finds an audience eager to speak "body language" and to "read a person like a book." To the student of communication, however, there is something disquieting about this popular

approach to a sober subject. A book jacket whispers, "Read BODY LANGUAGE so that you can penetrate the personal secrets, both of intimates and total strangers"--and one imagines a sort of kinesic peeping Tom, eyeball to the keyhole, able to use his awful knowledge of blinks, crossed legs, and puckers to some sinister end. In reality, the need for gestural understanding goes far beyond power games or parlor games. There is a critical need on the part of anyone who works with people to be sensitive to the nonverbal aspects of human interaction.

Dean Barnlund has developed a formula for measuring communicative success in person-to-person interaction. His "interpersonal equation" holds that understanding between people is dependent upon the degree of similarity of their belief systems, their perceptual orientations, and their communicative styles.[3] With regard to belief systems, Barnlund contends that people are likely to understand and enjoy each other more when their beliefs coincide than when their beliefs clash. Experience confirms that shared attitudes toward fashion, sex, politics, and religion make for an agreeable luncheon or golf game.

The second factor described by Barnlund--perceptual orientation--refers to the way people approach reality. There are those who look at the world through a wide-angle lens--savoring new experiences, new ideas, new friends. Because they have a high tolerance for ambiguity, they can suspend judgment when confronted with a new situation and postpone evaluation until further information is acquired. There are others who look at the world through a narrower lens. They prefer familiar paths, predictable people, ideas arranged in comfortable designs. Because the unknown unnerves them, they do not go adventuring. They resolve ambiguities as quickly as possible, using categories ("hippies," "Orientals," "good old boys") to protect themselves from the pain of exploration. Those who perceive the world through the same lens--be it wide-angle or narrow--feel more comfortable with others who share the same perceptual orientation.

The third element of Barnlund's formula--similarity of communicative styles--presents the likelihood that congenial communicants enjoy talking about the same topics, tune easily into the same factual or emotional levels of meaning, share a preference for form (argument, banter, self-disclosure, exposition), operate intelligibly on the verbal band, and--most critical to the present discussion--understand each other at the nonverbal level.

Barnlund's formula underscores what Allport pointed out two decades ago in The Nature of Prejudice:[4] human beings are drawn to other human beings who share their own beliefs, customs, and values; they are repelled by those who disagree, who behave unpredictably, who speak--at every level of communication--an alien tongue. It follows that if language teachers are to help bridge gulfs in understanding between cultures, they must teach more than verbal

language. They must help students develop a tolerance for belief systems at odds with their own and a sensitivity to differences in modes of perception and expression.

The Nonverbal Channel of Expression

Teachers in our highly literate society are oriented toward the verbal channel of expression. They tend to see the word as the central carrier of meaning. At an intuitive level they recognize the importance of prosodic elements (pitch, loudness, rhythm, stress, resonance, and pause), because these add emotional dimension to the spoken word. They are less inclined, however, to accord importance to what Edward Hall terms "the silent language." Enmeshed in the warp and the woof of words, teachers find it hard to believe that the average American speaks for only ten to eleven minutes a day, and that more than 65 percent of the social meaning of a typical two-person exchange is carried by nonverbal cues.[5]

For simplicity, the nonverbal aspects of communication may be divided into three classes:

(1) Body language, comprising movement, gesture, posture, facial expression, gaze, touch, and distancing;

(2) Object language, including the use of signs, designs, realia, artifacts, clothing, and personal adornment to communicate with others;

(3) Environmental language, made up of those aspects of color, lighting, architecture, space, direction, and natural surroundings which speak to man about his nature.

Although it is critical that students of other cultures be perceptive when it comes to understanding both object and environmental language,[6] the focus of this monograph is on body language. Ray L. Birdwhistell gave the name "kinesics" to the discipline concerned with the study of all bodily motions that are communicative.[7] An understanding of kinesics across cultures necessitates a close look at posture, movement, facial expression, eye management, gestures, and proxemics (distancing).

Posture and Movement

Because human bodies are jointed and hinged in the same fashion we tend to think of all people around the globe as sitting, standing, and lying in virtually identical postures. Actually, scholars have found at least 1,000 significantly different body attitudes capable of being maintained steadily. The popularity of one posture over

another and the emotion conveyed by a given posture seem to be largely determined by culture.[8] Among those postures used to signal humility, for example, Krout cites the following:[9]

Sumatrans:	Bowing while putting joined hands between those of other person and lifting them to one's forehead.
Chinese:	Joining hands over head and bowing (signifying: "I submit with tired hands").
Turks and Persians:	Bowing, extending right arm, moving arm down from horizontal position, raising it to the level of one's head, and lowering it again (meaning: "I lift the earth off the ground and place it on my head as a sign of submission to you").
Congo natives:	Stretching hands toward person and striking them together.
New Caledonians:	Crouching.
Dahomeans: (now Benins)	Crawling and shuffling forward; walking on all fours.
Batokas:	Throwing oneself on the back, rolling from side to side, slapping outside of thighs (meaning: "You need not subdue me; I am subdued already").

No matter how poetic the meaning, this gymnastic parade of posture would either embarrass or disgust most Americans, who are not readily inclined to show humility in any guise. A slight downward tilt of the head and lowering of the eyes are as much kinesic signaling as they would be willing to accord that emotion. In fact, Americans are conditioned to accept a relatively narrow band of postures. A few parental admonitions continue to ring in the ear long after childhood and find their way to adult lips: "Stand tall!" "Sit up straight!" "Keep your hands in your lap!" But because the postural vocabulary of Americans is limited, they have difficulty accepting the wider range of postures found in other cultures. For example, the fact that one-fourth of the world's population prefers to squat rather than to sit in a chair leaves Americans uneasy. To most Americans, squatting is something savages do around campfires. They find it inconceivable that refined adults might sit on their heels in movie theater seats, as they sometimes do in Japan.[10]

The need to be aware of postural differences became dramatically clear to an American student who was visited by a friend who had come home from a long stay in the Ivory Coast. She brought her

little son along, and the student was enchanted when the child toddled over to him and climbed into his lap. Instead of cuddling there, however, the child squirmed under the student's arm, around his side, and crawled onto his back. The startled young man, suddenly ill at ease, expected the mother to instruct her son to get down. Instead, she explained that mothers in the Ivory Coast carry their infants on their backs. As a result, when a child seeks a warm and loving spot, it is not in a lap, but on a back. Unfortunately for cross-cultural understanding, Americans are conditioned to regard this position as onerous, an attitude reflected linguistically every time a harassed individual snarls, "Get off my back!"

Cross-cultural studies of posture and movement indicate that macrokinesic systems may be determined by cultural norms. Sociologist Laurence Wylie, studying mime in Paris with students from twenty-five countries, found that national differences seemed to be accentuated by nonverbal techniques.[11] For example, when improvising trees, French students are "espaliered pear trees, and the Americans, unpruned apple trees." Differences in walking styles are so marked, Wylie maintains, that "in Paris one can recognize Americans two hundred yards away simply by the way they walk." To the French eye, the American walk is uncivilized. "You bounce when you walk" is their negative assessment. Wylie concludes that French child-rearing practices, which stress conformity to a disciplined social code, produce adults who reflect the tension and rigidity of French society. "They stand," he observes, "erect and square-shouldered, moving their arms when they walk as if the space around them were severely limited." Americans, on the other hand, seem to have a loose and easy gait. They walk with free-swinging arms, relaxed shoulders and pelvis, as though "moving through a broad space scarcely limited by human or physical obstacles."[12] Interestingly, this perception of American gait conflicts with the findings of an unpublished study reported by Hall, in which Spanish Americans perceive Anglo Americans as having an uptight, authoritarian walk whenever they aren't deliberately ambling; the Anglo, conversely, perceives the Spanish American male walk as more of a swagger than a purposeful walk.[13]

The degree to which kinesic activity is culture-bound becomes obvious when one watches a foreign movie where English has been dubbed in by the process of "lip-synching." The audience watches the foreign actors but hears a specially taped version of the script read in English by native speakers. Although the English words are timed and even shaped to fit the lip movements, they do not accord with the total body gloss as represented by facial expression, gestures, and posture. French actors, for example, are seen gesturing in the tight, restricted French manner while seeming to say English words that require broad, loose gestures. Observers may feel amused or irritated, but the sense of imbalance is so subtle that they rarely pinpoint the source.[14]

Speeches given by New York's colorful mayor, Fiorello LaGuardia, who spoke fluent Italian, Yiddish, and American English, illustrate how closely kinesic activity is linked to culture. An observer familiar with the three cultures could watch LaGuardia on a newsreel film without a sound track and tell readily which of the three languages he was speaking. There seems to be a subtle shift of kinesic gears when a fluent speaker slips from one language to another.

Alan Lomax and associates analyzed folk dance styles with a recording system called "choreometrics."[15] They found that the patterns of movement used by members of a culture in their work or recreation were reflected in the movements of their dances. Eskimo hunters, for example, assume a stocky, straddled stance and bring their weapon arm diagonally down across their body when harpooning a seal or spearing a salmon. When they dance, they assume the same stance, holding a drum in the left hand and bringing the drumstick held in the right hand diagonally down across the body.

Lomax's choreometric analysis revealed that people seem to fall into two distinct groups: those who move the trunk as if it were a solid, one-unit block, and those who move the trunk as if it were two or more units--bending and swaying the upper and lower sections independently of each other. One-unit cultures--including aboriginal Australians, American Indians, and most Eurasians--use rigid, energetic movements that contrast sharply with the undulating, sinuous motions of the multi-unit cultures (Polynesian, African, and Indian). The choreometric contrast becomes clear when one pictures the fluid grace of the hula juxtaposed with the angular tension of an American Indian dance.

Recent studies of rhythm as it relates to body movement have revealed astonishing new insights into human interaction.[16] William Condon found that when individuals talk, their body keeps time to the rhythm of their own speech. We are aware of this synchrony when someone sings; the sight of people swinging and swaying (or tapping and twitching) to the beat of the song they sing is so familiar that we take it for granted. The same thing happens at a much subtler level when a person speaks. Movements of the fingers, eyelids and brows, head, and other body parts occur as a sort of rhythmic punctuation to the rise and fall of the voice and the flow of syllables. The whole body moves "in sync" with the words.

Not only are people in sync with themselves, but as they converse with each other, their body movements gradually fall into rhythmic harmony with those of their conversation partner. Sometimes this interactional synchrony is on a microlevel and is not easy to observe. At other times, two people in synchrony will assume the same postural configurations, almost as if they were mirror images of one another. Condon found that when two people in conversation were wired to electroencephalographs, "the recording pens moved

together as though driven by a single brain." When a third person entered the picture and called one of the speakers away, the recording pens no longer moved in unison. When synchrony does not occur between speakers, it is usually a signal that an unconscious tension is inhibiting the microdance.

It is probably unrealistic for foreign language students to expect their textbooks to provide a model for behavior in this area ("Sync or Swim in Spanish"?). Nevertheless, as research uncovers significant information about differences in rhythms across cultures, it should be transmitted to language students to enhance their kinesic awareness.

Facial Expression

Poets and philosophers have always been aware of the role played by the face in communication. "The features of our face are hardly more than gestures which have become permanent," wrote Marcel Proust in Remembrance of Things Past. And, according to Emerson, "A man finds room in the few square inches of his face for the traits of all his ancestors; for the expression of all his history, and his wants."[17] It takes a kinesicist like Birdwhistell, however, to analyze how man uses those few square inches of his face. According to his research, middle class Americans display about thirty-three "kinemes" (single communicative movements) in the face area:[18]

Three head nod kinemes (single, double, and triple nod)
Two lateral head sweep kinemes (the single and double sweep)
One head cock kineme
One head tilt kineme
Three connective, whole head motion kinemes (head raise and hold, head lower and hold, and current head position hold)
Four eyebrow motion kinemes (lifted, lowered, knit, and single movement)
Four eyelid closure kinemes (over-open, slit, closed, and squeezed)
Four nose movement kinemes (wrinkled nose, compressed nostril, unilateral nostril flare, and bilateral nostril flare)
Seven mouth movement kinemes (compressed lips, protruded lips, retracted lips, apically withdrawn lips, snarl, lax open mouth, and mouth over-open)
Two chin thrust kinemes (anterior and lateral chin thrusts)
One puffed cheeks kineme
One sucked cheeks kineme

The implications of such complex kinesic behavior for language learners who would master the nonverbal system of another culture are staggering. Even Americans cannot consciously produce the thirty-three subtle variations just listed without some instruction. To further complicate matters, kinesicists believe that in addition

to the facial displays that are readily visible, there are others that are "micromomentary"--occurring so rapidly that they are invisible to the conscious eye. In one experiment, Ekman flashed pictures of facial expressions on a laboratory screen at speeds up to one-hundredth of a second. People staring at the screen insisted that they saw nothing but a blank screen. But when urged to guess what facial expression might be depicted by an image they perceived subliminally, they were astounded to discover that most of their "guesses" corresponded to the correct expressions on the "unseen" faces.[19] Ekman concluded that we all have the perceptual ability to decode facial messages at one-hundredth of a second, but that we have been systematically taught in childhood not to pay attention to these fleeting expressions because they are too revealing.

A device that enables individuals to check their ability to judge facial expressions is the Facial Meaning Sensitivity Test. Part I requires the taker to match ten full-face photographs with "the ten basic classes of facial meaning": disgust, happiness, interest, sadness, bewilderment, contempt, surprise, anger, determination, and fear. In Parts II and III, the task involves thirty additional photos with more discriminating categories of facial expression. Dale Leathers contends that by working with the FMST, one can markedly improve both decoding and encoding skills--learning to be more sensitive to the expressions of others and to communicate one's own feelings more accurately through facial expression.[20]

Gaze and Eye Management

Whether the eyes are "the windows of the soul" is debatable; that they are intensely important in interpersonal communication is a fact. During the first two months of a baby's life, the stimulus that produces a smile is a pair of eyes.[21] The eyes need not be real: a mask with two dots will produce a smile. Significantly, a real human face with eyes covered will not motivate a smile, nor will the sight of only one eye when the face is presented in profile. This attraction to eyes as opposed to the nose or mouth continues as the baby matures. In one study, when American four-year-olds were asked to draw people, 75 percent of them drew people with mouths, but 99 percent of them drew people with eyes.[22] In Japan, however, where babies are carried on their mother's back, infants do not acquire as much attachment to eyes as they do in other cultures. As a result, Japanese adults make little use of the face either to encode or decode meaning. In fact, Argyle reveals that the "proper place to focus one's gaze during a conversation in Japan is on the neck of one's conversation partner."[23]

The role of eye contact in a conversational exchange between two Americans is well defined: speakers make contact with the eyes of their listener for about one second, then glance away as they talk; in a few moments they re-establish eye contact with the listener

to reassure themselves that their audience is still attentive, then shift their gaze away once more. Listeners, meanwhile, keep their eyes on the face of the speaker, allowing themselves to glance away only briefly. It is important that they be looking at the speaker at the precise moment when the speaker re-establishes eye contact; if they are not looking, the speaker assumes that they are disinterested and will either pause until eye contact is resumed or will terminate the conversation. Just how critical this eye maneuvering is to the maintenance of conversational flow becomes evident when two speakers are wearing dark glasses: there may be a sort of traffic jam of words caused by interruptions, false starts, and unpredictable pauses.[24]

There is evidence that eye management patterns differ among American subgroups. In poor black families people look at one another less than in middle class white families. It may even be that the pattern of "speaker looks away, listener looks at" is reversed to become "listener looks away, speaker looks at."[25] If so, this would account for the uneasy feelings that sometimes develop when even the best-intentioned members of the two races try to communicate. Similar differences in eye behavior have been noted between Puerto Rican children and their middle class American teachers. And in Ohio, teachers of children moving from rural Appalachia to urban centers reported difficulties in adjusting to eye contact patterns in which the children looked down when talking to their teachers. Teachers had to learn that this was a culturally determined respect pattern, not a furtive avoidance signal.[26]

Erving Goffman discusses an American eye management technique that he calls "civil inattention."[27] An interpersonal ritual used in public places, it involves looking at other persons just long enough to catch their eye in recognition of the fact that they are other human beings, then looking away as if to say, "I trust that you will not harm me, and I recognize your right to privacy." When two people perform this ritual on the street, they may eye each other up to approximately eight feet, then cast their eyes down or away as the other passes--a kind of "dimming of lights," as Goffman puts it. Actually, the timing of this act requires considerable subtlety; the individual's gaze cannot be absent, or averted, or prolonged, or hostile, or invitational; it has to be civilly inattentive, and one acquires a feel for it without formal instruction.

Two strategies in contrast to the civil inattention courtesy are the deliberate withholding of all eye contact--which has the effect of a dehumanizing, nonverbal snub--and the intense focusing of gaze known as "the hate stare." The author observed an example of the latter several years ago in a church. An obviously unhappy matron, perturbed to find a racially mixed couple seated in a pew near the front of "her" church, walked slowly down the aisle past the couple and fixed them with a baleful glare. So intent was she

upon prolonging her hate stare that she maintained eye contact even after passing the couple, which necessitated considerable craning and twisting of her neck. Unable to watch where her steps were leading her, she smacked into a marble pillar with what was to most observers a satisfyingly painful thud.

In-depth studies of eye management in foreign cultures are not readily available. A skimming of differences across cultures reveals that there is great variation in this aspect of communication.[28] British etiquette decrees that the speaker and listener focus attentively on each other. While an American listener nods and murmurs to signal that he is listening, the Englishman remains silent and merely blinks his eyes. Germans tend to maintain a steady gaze while talking. The American shift of gaze from eye to eye and away from the face entirely is not a pattern familiar to Germans. Peruvians, Bolivians, and Chileans consider insulting the absence of eye contact while talking. Arabs, too, share a great deal of eye contact and regard too little gaze as rude and disrespectful. In North Africa, the Tuaregs stare unwaveringly at the eyes during a conversation, perhaps because the eyes are the only part of the body not hidden beneath a swirl of veils and robes. On the streets, Israelis stare at others without self-consciousness. The French are also likely to stare at strangers, as anyone who has ever walked past a sidewalk café can attest. Greeks actively enjoy staring and being stared at in public; when they travel in the West they feel slightly diminished because people do not look at them.

Just why one culture should evolve an eye contact pattern diametrically opposed to that of another is not clear. Underlying some avoidance behaviors may be the primitive concept of "the evil eye." Believers feel that an actual substance--a malevolent ray--comes from the eye and influences the person or object it strikes. Witches endowed with the evil eye supposedly leave a thin film of poison on the surface of a mirror when their gaze strikes it. In Naples, even today, priests and monks are thought to possess the evil eye and passersby assiduously avoid their gaze.[29]

Research in kinesic communication has moved from the evil eye to the revealing eye. Eckhard Hess has delineated a field of study that he calls "pupillometrics." His research shows that when people look at a sight which is pleasing to them, their pupils dilate measurably; conversely, when they regard something that is displeasing or repugnant, their pupils constrict. People interacting with others seem to respond to pupil size, albeit at an unconscious level. Hess showed a group of photographs to male subjects, including two ostensibly identical photos of the same pretty girl. In one photo, however, her pupils had been enlarged through a retouching process. The men's responses--measured by increases in the size of their own pupils--were more than twice as positive to the picture with the dilated pupils.[30] No cross-cultural studies on pupillometrics have been reported, but it seems likely

that this is a physiological condition that would be observable in all cultures. The differences among cultures would lie in the nature of the sight that was perceived as pleasing or displeasing.

Gestures

Members of the same culture share a common body idiom--that is, they tend to read a given nonverbal signal in the same way. If two people read a signal in a different way, it is partial evidence that they belong to different cultures. In Colombia, an American Peace Corps worker relaxes with his feet up on the furniture; his shocked Colombian hostess perceives the gesture as disgusting. Back in the States, a university president poses for a photograph with his feet up on the desk; newspaper readers react with affection for "good old President Jones." While Americans use the feet-on-furniture gesture to signal "I'm relaxed and at home here," or "See how casual and folksy I am," neither message is received by a Colombian, who reads the signal as "boor!" An understanding of the role gestures play within a culture is critical to sensitive communication.

Hayes divides gestures into three categories that facilitate discussion: autistic gestures, technical gestures, and folk gestures.[31] Autistic--or nervous--gestures are made by individuals in response to their own inner turmoil and are thus not strictly conditioned by culture. They may take the form of biting the lips or fingernails, cracking the knuckles, jiggling a leg, or twitching a facial muscle. Occasionally, however, they become stereotyped signs for certain attitudes--toe-tapping to indicate impatience, thumb-twiddling to show boredom--and thus pass into the realm of tradition.

Other movements fall under the heading of technical gestures and include such complex systems of communication as the sign language of the deaf, the gestures of umpires and referees, military salutes, and the signals of music conductors, traffic directors, and radio performers. Technical gestures carry uniform meaning for members of a specialized group and are usually taught formally.

Folk gestures, on the other hand, are the property of an entire culture and are passed on by imitation. Something as simple as the act of pointing is a folk gesture. Residents of Europe and North America point with the forefinger, the other fingers curled under the palm. American Indians, certain Mongoloid peoples, and sub-Saharan Africans point with their lips.[32] Members of these cultures are not taught by their parents how to point (although they may be told when not to point). They learn by observation--the same way in which they acquire a complete repertoire of folk gestures.

Descriptive gestures include movements used to accompany such statements as "He wound up like this and threw that old ball"; "It swooped down and flew under the bridge"; "She was about this tall." It might seem that these gestures are culture-free, determined simply by the nature of the motion described. Analysis reveals, however, that many descriptive gestures are indeed culture-bound. Reid Scott discusses the gestural background in Mexico for the statement "She was about this tall."

> In parts of Mexico the gesture for indicating how tall something is has three definite cultemes (aspects of culture essential to understanding). The arm held vertically with the index finger extended and the rest of the fingers folded indicates the height of a person. The arm and hand held horizontally, thumb up and little finger down, indicates the height of an animal. The same position, except with palm down, indicates the height of an inanimate object. In most countries, there is only one culteme; it includes measuring humans, subhumans, and all other objects, and it has a single gesture, the last one described, to express it. We can imagine the laughter and even anger that one would cause if he were to measure your dear aunt with the gesture reserved for cows.[33]

A knowledge of the folk gestures of any group provides one way to share in the humor of that culture. A few examples from the American folk gestural system will illustrate the possibilities. The elaborate handshake that began with jazz musicians and spread to other in-groups is today practiced with a kind of gleeful exaggeration by young black males. Mock handshakes are also used to characterize certain professions: the "politicians' handshake," for instance, begins with a great show of false enthusiasm and ends with both parties reaching over each other's shoulders to pick each other's pockets.[34] In some jokes, the humor is carried entirely on the nonverbal band. To illustrate how a stupid person "looks for a land mine," the joke-teller covers his eyes with his hand and advances slowly forward, stomping the ground ahead of him with an extended foot. To demonstrate a numskull "hitchhiking in the rain," the jokester makes the usual American hitchhiking signal of the hand with extended thumb, then holds his other hand protectively above it to shelter the thumb from the rain.

Because folk gestures are in circulation, they tend to develop variations in meaning and execution. Nevertheless, they are the gestures that are most profitably learned by those who intend to interact with members of another culture. Whether "learned" means incorporated into students' active kinesic systems so that they can produce the gesture on demand, or merely learned in the sense that they can recognize the meaning of the gesture in its appropriate social context, is a matter of debate among language educators.

Jerald R. Green, author of Kinesics in the Foreign Language Classroom,[35] believes that the use of gestures adds dimension to language production. "It is neither unrealistic nor unreasonable," he writes, "to expect the language instructor to insist that his pupils use authentic foreign culture gestures whenever appropriate in dialogue repetition." On the other hand, some native speakers --perhaps in a display of kinesic territoriality--feel that it is offensive to see members of a foreign culture using imperfectly the gestural system of a culture that is not their own. Birdwhistell warns that even though a gesture may be produced authentically by a sufficiently skilled non-native, its performance does not guarantee that the performer is aware of the full range of communicative contexts in which its use is appropriate.[36]

One solution would be for the teacher to draw up a list of gestures in order of their communicative value and teach them in descending order of importance. Gestures associated with greeting and leave-taking are critical, since it is difficult to function courteously within any culture without participating actively in these rituals. Gestures used for "yes" and "no," for showing approval and disapproval, and for making and refusing requests would also be useful.

Eisenberg and Smith discuss the variation across cultures in the simple act of attracting the attention of a waiter:[37]

> In America, the customer moves his forefinger toward himself, then away from himself, then toward himself again. A Latin American customer would make a downward arc with his right hand almost identical to the American jocular "away with you." The Shans of Burma accomplish the same purpose by holding the palm down, moving the fingers as if playing an arpeggio.... Waiters in India are summoned by a click of the fingers, which on the face of it, is an inconspicuous and efficient gesture. But such a gesture might elicit anger from an American waiter. For us, snapping fingers is the act of a superior asserting power over a menial. As such, finger snapping as a call for service is a violation of the democratic ethos.

Gestures that would be wise to know but not emulate are those considered vulgar or obscene by the foreign culture. Equally important for cross-cultural understanding is a knowledge of those gestures that are repugnant to Americans but regarded as acceptable in other cultures. A quick survey reveals the complexity of emotional response to kinesic interaction. In New Zealand and Australia, the hitchhiking signal used by Americans is tabu. The "O.K." gesture so familiar to North Americans is considered obscene in several Latin American cultures. In Paraguay, signs made with crossed fingers are offensive, but crossing the legs is permissible as long as the ankle does not touch the knee (the leg-cross position

preferred by many American men). In Germany, people who enter a row of seats in a theater should face those already seated in the row as they pass in front of them; to turn the back is considered insulting. Korean etiquette decrees that loud smacking and sucking sounds made while eating are a compliment to the host. And although one should never blow one's nose at a Korean table, sniffling throughout the repast is acceptable behavior.

Even within national boundaries, differences in kinesic behaviors exist. Black Americans use the index finger a great deal in gesturing and also show the palm more frequently than do white Americans. Teenage blacks from working class families move their shoulders much more than their white counterparts.[38] An interesting account of "cut-eye" and "suck-teeth," two gestures known to many black Americans but virtually unknown to whites, is found in the Journal of American Folklore.[39] The authors trace the origin of these kinesic signals to Africa. Cut-eye is a kind of visual snub that communicates disapproval and general rejection of the person at whom it is aimed. It involves directing a hostile glare at the other person, then moving the eyeballs down in a sight line cutting across the person's body, another glare, and finally turning the entire head contemptuously away--often to the accompaniment of a satisfying suck-teeth. Suck-teeth by itself is also capable of conveying anger, exasperation, or annoyance. It is made with the lips either pouted or spread out. Air is drawn through the teeth and into the mouth to create a loud sucking sound.

Proxemics

Edward T. Hall, whose book The Hidden Dimension deals with the perception and use of space (proxemics), demonstrates that individuals follow predictable patterns in establishing the distance between themselves and those with whom they interact. In each culture the amount of space varies depending upon the nature of the social interaction, but all cultures seem to distinguish the four basic categories delineated by Hall.[40]

Middle class Americans, for example, have established the following interaction distances within the four categories:[41]

(1) Intimate distance. From body contact to a separation space of eighteen inches. An emotionally charged zone used for love making, sharing, protecting, and comforting.

(2) Personal distance. From one and one-half to four feet. Used for informal contact between friends. A "small protective sphere or bubble" that separates one person from another.

(3) Social distance. From four to twelve feet. The casual interaction distance between acquaintances and strangers.

Used in business meetings, classrooms, and impersonal social affairs.

(4) Public distance. Between twelve and twenty-five feet. A cool interaction distance used for one-way communication from speaker to audience. Necessitates a louder voice, stylized gestures, and more distinct enunciation.

Proxemic distances preferred by Americans do not correspond to those preferred by people of other cultures. Observance of interaction zones is critical to harmonious relations, but because these zones exist at a subconscious level, they are often violated by nonmembers of a culture. The amount and type of all physical contacts--including touching and the exchange of breath and body odors --vary among cultures. One study dealt with the number of times couples touched each other in cafés: in San Juan, Puerto Rico, they touched 180 times per hour; in Paris, 110; and in London, 0.[42] The London couples would be prime candidates for culture shock in an African culture where two people engaged in casual conversation intertwine their legs as they talk.[43]

In general, high-contact cultures (Arabs, Latin Americans, Greeks, and Turks) usually stand close to each other. Low-contact cultures (northern Europeans, Americans) stand further apart. Barnlund's cross-cultural study of the public and private self in Japan and in the United States points out the dramatic contrasts in proxemic relationships between the two peoples. As a channel of communication, touch appears to be twice as important within the American culture as it is among the Japanese.[44] Although during infancy and early childhood the Japanese foster a closer tactile relationship than do Americans, the situation changes markedly as the child nears adolescence. In one study, a considerable number of Japanese teenagers reported no physical contact at all with either a parent or with a friend.[45] The adult Japanese extends the pattern by restricting not only tactile communication but facial and gestural display as well.

The reasons why one culture will prefer a close interaction distance and another demand more space are not clear. Hall theorizes that cultures have different perceptions of where the boundaries of the self are located.[46] Americans and northern Europeans think of themselves as being contained within their skin. The zone of privacy is extended to include the clothes that cover the skin and even a small space around the body. Any infringement of these areas is looked upon as an invasion of privacy. But in the Arab culture, the self is thought of as being located at a sort of central core. "Tucking the ego down within the body shell," as Hall puts it, results in a totally different proxemic patterning. Arabs tolerate crowding, noise levels, the touching of hands, the probing of eyes, the moisture of exhaled breath, and a miasma of body odors that would overwhelm a Westerner. The ultimate invasion

of privacy to the Western mind--rape--does not even have a lexical equivalent in Arabic.[47]

In the areas of France that belong to the Mediterranean culture, there is a high level of sensory involvement and a degree of proxemic crowding that would make members of northern European cultures uncomfortable. In sharp contrast, the German concept of self necessitates a privacy sphere with wide boundaries.

Kinesic Universals

In the midst of an overwhelming number of gestures whose meanings differ across cultures, scholars are searching for examples of kinesic behavior whose meaning is universal. The so-called nature/nurture controversy finds researchers divided as to whether some expressive behaviors might stem from phylogenetic origins (nature) and thus be common to all mankind, or whether kinesic behaviors are learned from social contacts (nurture) and thus differ from one culture to another.

Birdwhistell, a cultural relativist on the "nurture" side, wrote in Kinesics and Context in 1970 (p. 81):

> Insofar as we know, there is no body motion or gesture that can be regarded as a universal symbol. That is, we have been unable to discover any single facial expression, stance, or body position which conveys an identical meaning in all societies.

Back in 1872, however, Charles Darwin, arguing from the "nature" standpoint, hypothesized that the headshake to indicate "no" had its origins when the baby, satiated, turned its head away from the breast and emphasized refusal by rhythmic repetition of this sideways movement.[48] (It has since been pointed out, however, that in some cultures the use of the headshake signals "yes.")

A strong contemporary voice for the innate side of the controversy is that of Eibl-Eibesfeldt, who has isolated the "eyebrow flash" as one expressive movement that occurs across many cultures. It is executed by raising the eyebrows with a rapid movement, keeping them maximally raised for about one-sixth of a second, and then lowering them. This maneuver, which signals readiness for social contact and is used mainly when greeting, has been recorded on film among the Europeans, Balinese, Papuans of New Guinea, Samoans, South American Indians, and the Bushmen. Certainly it plays an important role in the American kinesic system. It is suppressed in only a few cultures: in Japan, for instance, it is considered indecent.

Eibl-Eibesfeldt contends that kinesic similarities exist across cultures not only in basic expressions but in whole syndromes of behavior. Such patterns include greetings that involve embracing and kissing (Eibl-Eibesfeldt feels that these are apparently very old since they occur also in chimpanzees), the smiling response, and actions to indicate coyness, embarrassment, and flirting (hiding the entire face, or concealing the mouth behind one hand). Another example is the cluster of actions that express anger, including "opening the corners of the mouth in a particular way," scowling, stamping the foot, clenching the fist, and striking out to hit objects. The anger syndrome can be observed in the congenitally deaf-blind, who have had no opportunity to learn by watching others. In fact, Eibl-Eibesfeldt's studies of these children show that they portray the facial expressions regarded as "typical" when they laugh, smile, sulk, cry, and express fear or surprise, a fact that tends to support the "innate" viewpoint.

Researching facial expressions across cultures, Paul Ekman and associates concluded that "there are a set of facial components that are associated with emotional categories in the same way for all men, since the same faces were found to be judged as showing the same emotions in many cultures."[49] People in Borneo, Brazil, Japan, the United States, and New Guinea all identified the "primary emotions" (happiness, anger, sadness, fear, surprise, and disgust) with a high rate of agreement. Ekman points out, however, that each society has its own display rules that govern when it is appropriate to exhibit or to conceal these expressions.[50]

Ekman is also searching for gestures ("emblems") that carry consistent meaning across cultures. His research in such disparate cultures as the U.S., New Guinea, Japan, and Argentina seems to support the hypothesis that there <u>are</u> pan-cultural gestures and that they relate primarily to bodily functions, such as eating, sleeping, and lovemaking.[51] For example, one widely distributed emblem is the "I've had enough to eat" motion in which gesturers put a hand on their stomach and either pat or rub it. Since food--be it an American hamburger or Japanese sukiyaki--goes predictably to the stomach when swallowed, the logic of the gesture accounts for its universality. On the other hand, more complex activities produce culture-specific gestures. As Davis points out in <u>Inside Intuition</u> (p. 77):

> Though the emblem for eating always involves a hand-to-mouth pantomime, in Japan one hand cups an imaginary bowl at about chin level, while the other scoops imaginary food into the mouth; but in New Guinea, where people eat sitting on the floor, the hand shoots out to arm's length, picks up an imaginary tidbit, and carries it to the mouth.

<u>The Role of Kinesics</u>

While it is clear that all cultures make use of kinesic behaviors in communication, scholars do not agree on the precise nature of

the role they play. Scheflen points out that there are currently two schools of thought in the behavioral sciences.[52] The "psychological school" follows the view set forth by Charles Darwin that nonverbal behavior expresses emotions. Most students of language and culture are aware of the emotive role of gesture, posture, and facial expression: drooping shoulder indicates depression; a scowl registers displeasure, etc. The more recent "communication school," including many ethologists and anthropologists, holds that nonverbal behaviors are used to regulate human interaction. Scheflen insists that the two views are not incompatible--that the behaviors of human communication are both expressive and social.[53]

To understand the idea of kinesic behavior as social control, however, one must become sensitive to the nonverbal behaviors that regulate--or monitor--social interactions. Ordinarily they are performed so automatically and at such an unconscious level that even those performing them are unaware of their own actions. Some of these monitoring behaviors are probably universal in man and have counterparts in the behavior of animals. Examples of this type of monitoring include:[54]

(1) Turning and looking at the source of a disruption (often quells the disturbance);

(2) Looking "through" a person who is trying to join a gathering (a signal that he is not wanted);

(3) Turning away from someone who is initiating an action (indicates that he will not receive support);

(4) Recoiling or flinching from a sudden loud or aggressive display
(warns the offender to step back or speak more softly).

Another group of monitors that are less automatic and seem to have evolved from the reactions mentioned above include such facial expressions as those of disgust, boredom, and anger. These monitors are used to provide a running commentary on another's behavior. A monitoring signal of this type common in America is the act of wiping the index finger laterally across the nostrils. It comes into play when someone violates the norms of the group by such actions as lying, using profanity, or encroaching on personal space. This was the kinesic signal used unconsciously by President Eisenhower when he chose to be less than candid during press interviews. He was reportedly warned of the revealing nature of this action so that he could avoid its use thereafter. The anecdote points up the fact that most monitoring acts are carried out without the actor's awareness. It also illustrates a third type of monitoring --self-monitoring--in which those who transgress the social norms perform the monitoring act upon themselves.[55]

Kinesicists are in agreement that nonverbal signals can be more powerful than verbal ones. Verbal signals call for cognitive processing; nonverbal signals operate directly, bypassing conscious analysis and evoking immediate action.[56] Since information can be carried simultaneously on both verbal and nonverbal channels, one is able to negotiate social relationships and supply emotional feedback nonverbally while exchanging information of a cognitive nature verbally. Emotions, feelings, and interpersonal attitudes are often more effectively expressed by the nonverbal than by the verbal. And while the spoken word does not always convey the truth, kinesic evidence tends to depict reality. As Charles Galloway puts it, "It is to the fidelity of human experience that nonverbal meanings have value."[57]

Kinesics and Perceptual Education

Sapir spoke of nonverbal behavior as "an elaborate and secret code that is written nowhere, known by none, and understood by all." Unfortunately for cross-cultural understanding, the "all" refers only to members of the same culture. Bursack filmed Minneapolis men and women who deliberately tried to express "agreement" and "courtesy" nonverbally in an interview situation.[58] The filmed sequences were studied by citizens of Beirut, Tokyo, and Bogotá. The foreigners were unable to "read" with accuracy the Americans' nonverbal attempts to communicate the two feelings critical to establishing a warm social climate.

We have seen how inextricably movement is linked to meaning. Those who have "learned" a language without including the nonverbal component are seriously handicapped if they intend to interact with living members of the culture instead of with paper and print. Insights into posture, movement, facial expression, eye management, gestures, and distancing as they affect communication not only increase sensitivity to other human beings but deepen inevitably students' understanding of their own kinesic systems.

Research on nonverbal communication is patiently unraveling Sapir's "elaborate and secret code." We know now that in order to really understand, we must be able to hear the silent message and read the invisible word. The study of kinesics across cultures must be a crucial part of our perceptual education.

APPENDIX

Suggested Activities for Sensitizing Students to Aspects of Nonverbal Communication

I. *To Make Students Aware of the Scope of the Subject*

Introduce the term "kinesics" (the study of body motions that are communicative). Ask students to draw up a list of topics that they feel would come under this heading. Combine their lists into one outline on the board. [Their outline will probably be incomplete.] Help them fill it out to include all aspects of kinesics: posture, movement styles, facial expressions, gaze, proxemics (distancing), and gestures (including hand, arm, head, neck, shoulders, torso, hips, legs, and feet).

II. *To Sensitize Students to Their Own Communicative Patterns*

Give students the following list of questions (from Eisenberg and Smith, Nonverbal Communication, p. 8) and ask them to contribute their responses in a class discussion:

(1) Do you ever avoid talking to someone because he speaks too slowly or too loudly?

(2) What are the three most common gestures you make when you speak? Do these gestures say anything about your personality?

(3) How do you know that someone is interested in talking with you when that interest is not verbalized?

(4) Under what circumstances do you say what you don't mean? When you do, have you ever noticed yourself telling a lie with your face?

(5) Why do you act differently when you are in your own house than when you are in the house of a friend?

(6) At what distance does a good friend get "too close"? At what distance does a fellow student, whom you do not know well, get "too close"? Why is there a difference?

(7) Have you ever felt hostile or friendly toward someone just because of his appearance?

(8) Do you sit in the same chair at home? At school? At work? Have you ever gotten angry because someone took your seat? Why?

III. *To Make Students Aware of the Importance of Kinesics*

Psychologist Albert Mehrabian devised a formula that represents the total impact of a message:

7 percent verbal (actual word content)
38 percent vocal (tone, intonation, pitch, stress)
55 percent facial expression

Put this formula on the board, leaving the percentages blank. Ask the students to fill in the percentage of communicative impact made by the verbal, the vocal, and the facial components of an interpersonal exchange. [Remind them that their percentages must total 100 percent.] Put several suggested distributions on the board. Try to arrive at one that most students accept. Then fill in the percentages as revealed by Mehrabian's research.

IV. *To Make Students Aware of the Complexity of Kinesics*

Read Birdwhistell's list of American middle class movements located in the face and head area (see p. 7). Ask the students to try to make the movements as you read the list. Elicit discussion on the subtlety of facial expressions and the out-of-awareness aspect of gestural production. Do the students know of any facial expressions or head gestures from the foreign culture not included on the American list?

V. *To Help Students Understand Postural Differences across Cultures*

Ask for two volunteers to come to the front of the class to demonstrate the postures used in various cultures to represent the emotion of humility (see list p. 4). Begin with the students' own nonverbal expression of humility. Then ask them to demonstrate the postures of other cultures. In the discussion that follows, ask the students who participated how they felt when assuming the positions: were some postures more awkward (humiliating, embarrassing, etc.) than others? Ask the other students how they felt watching the demonstration.

VI. *To Give Students an Awareness of the Rich Gestural Vocabulary They Possess in Their Own Culture*

Discuss briefly autistic, technical, and folk (including descriptive) gestures. Divide the class into small groups that are to compete with each other. Ask each group to draw up as rapidly as possible a list of the folk gestures of their own culture. Start them off with an example or two. At the end of ten minutes, have each group take turns demonstrating a gesture while the other groups call out the meaning. No group may repeat a gesture already presented. The last group

to give a gesture wins. Point out the surprising number of nonverbal signals known in common by members of the class. Use these suggestions as a checklist:

> Snap fingers; tap toe; shrug; flex biceps; shade eyes to peer; draw finger across throat; cross fingers; knock on wood; cross heart; spit on ground (disdain); raise right hand (swear truth); hold nose; limp wrist (homosexual); wave; thumb a ride; shake scolding finger; point to chest (me!); raise eyebrows; wink; slap on back; finger on lips (shhh); point with finger; rub one finger on another, pointing to offender (shame); beckon; thumbs up; thumbs down; peace sign; V for victory; hug self, shiver (cold); wipe brow (hot; narrow escape); stick out tongue; thumbs in ears and waggle fingers; "quotation" signs in air; smack lips; hands on hips; "O.K." symbol; rotate finger in air at side of head (crazy); play imaginary violin while someone tells sad tale; blow on nails, then rub on chest (ego trip); make curvy outline in air with both hands (sexy woman); handshake; throw kiss; rub stomach; cradle head against folded hands; clasp hands above head and shake (victory); bow head; stamp foot; hand up, palm forward (stop!); sign of cross; tap watch (time's up).

VII. *To Make Students Aware of the Cultural Differences in Gestures*

Have several students demonstrate the American gestures for the following list of emotions or directions:

> Yes/no; come/go; start/stop; that's good/that's bad; I'm happy/I'm sad; it's over there/it's over here; go up/go down; I like you/I dislike you; bring it here/take it away; be quiet/make more noise; a little bit/a lot; short/long; stand up/be seated; up/down.

Take about five minutes to conduct the class without words, using the gestures demonstrated. Then ask the class to imagine that they are in a culture where the meaning of each gesture is exactly reversed: a head nod means "no," a head shake means "yes"; a smile means "I'm sad," a frown means "I'm happy"; etc. Conduct the class for another five to ten minutes using the new gestural code. Or divide the class into small groups to prepare skits showing a segment of social interaction with the new code. Discuss the possibilities for cross-cultural misunderstanding.

VIII. *To Make Students Aware of Proxemic Patterns*

Explain that each individual requires a "personal space bubble" that must not be encroached upon by others. Among Americans, the diameter ranges from two feet to four feet and varies

according to time, place, and circumstances. (At an X-rated movie the line at the ticket window is more compressed than is the line for a G-rated movie.) As homework, ask students to invade deliberately another person's space bubble without an invitation and to make note of resultant comments and such variables as age, nationality, personality, time, place, and relationship between the interactants. Have them bring to class the next day a brief report on their experiment. Point out that proxemic patterns are to a large extent culturally determined. Discuss the patterns of the foreign culture. Compare with other cultures to give dimensionality.

IX. *To Help Students Acquire an Understanding of the Gestures of the Target Culture*

As a long-range assignment, ask students to develop a gesture inventory. Have them watch for gestures made by native speakers on television, in films, and on the streets, and demonstrate these to the class. Ask them to bring articles and clippings dealing with nonverbal behavior and share them with the class. Urge students to photograph interaction between native speakers. Invite native speakers to class for demonstrations. Insist that students study individual gestures in relation to communicative context. [No gesture may be "collected" without a description of who, where, why, etc.] At the end of the assignment period ask students to present their gesture inventory as a small-group or individual project. The final product may, for example, take the form of a slide show, a movie, wall charts, learning activity packets, or a scripted pantomime.

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